

## DEMOCRATS UNVEIL LEGISLATION TO HELP THE NATION'S UNINSURED

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Measures Could Provide Coverage For Over Half Of Today's Uninsured

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CONTACT: Lindsey Capps (202) 225-5065

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WASHINGTON,

D.C. — Saying “Something needs to be done NOW to help the growing number of uninsured Americans,” House Democrats, led by Congressmen Charles B. Rangel (NY-15), John D. Dingell (MI-15), Pete Stark (CA-13), Sherrod Brown (OH-13), Max Sandlin (TX-1), and Henry Waxman (CA-30), today unveiled three new measures designed to provide access to affordable health insurance for three fast-growing, vulnerable segments of the uninsured community: low-income, near-elderly, and small business employees — including the self-employed. Together, these three bills could help more than 21 million people — over half of all uninsured Americans — afford health insurance.

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Census Bureau reported that a staggering 43.6 million Americans lacked health insurance in 2002 and, because of today's difficult economy, that number is rising steadily. Americans are losing their jobs, and along with it, health insurance for them and their families. Employers are also struggling to maintain health insurance as a benefit for their employees.

As part of “Cover the Uninsured Week” the following bills were introduced to provide coverage to millions of uninsured:

The Medicare Early Access Act

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Medicare Early Access Act builds on Medicare's long history of providing quality and cost effective care for aging Americans by giving the millions of uninsured Americans between the ages of 55 and 65 the option to buy into Medicare to obtain their health insurance coverage.

To make this coverage affordable, it includes an advanceable, refundable tax credit for 75 percent of the premium cost.

The bill's lead author, Rep. Pete Stark, Ranking Democrat on the Ways and Means Health Subcommittee stated, "People aged 55 through 64 are the fastest growing segment of the uninsured. The Medicare Early Access Act provides a real, affordable health coverage option that builds on a program that works. It is especially important today as we see employers rapidly reducing or eliminating benefits for their retirees."

### The FamilyCare Act

The FamilyCare Act builds on Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), which have had great success in insuring children, the disabled, and the elderly. It ensures that entire families have coverage under the same plan, which has proven to be the most efficient way to provide health insurance. In 2002, approximately 7.5 million parents with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level (\$30,040 for a family of three in 2002) did not have health insurance. The FamilyCare Act provides new funding to cover those parents, and makes it easier for states to find and enroll eligible children and their parents in these successful programs.

"FamilyCare helps hard-working families afford to see their doctor. To do less is an outrage and certainly is counter to any 'economic stimulus' I've ever seen," said Rep. John D. Dingell, Ranking Democrat on the Committee on Energy and Commerce.

### The Small Business Health Insurance Promotion Act

This bill offers small business owners and the self-employed help in securing affordable health insurance. Under this bill, small businesses or self-employed individuals would become eligible to receive a 50 percent tax credit for four years to defray the cost of health insurance and provide an incentive for businesses not currently offering coverage to do so. Additionally, the bill creates permanent state and national multi-insurer pools to provide comprehensive and affordable health insurance choices to small employers and the self-employed.

Rep. Sandlin pointed out that

"over half of America's uninsured workers — more than 13 million people in 2002 — are self-employed or work for a small business with fewer than 50 employees." He added, "Those numbers tell us that small businesses and the self-employed are having a hard time meeting the growing cost of health insurance. It's about time we did something to help them offer and maintain health insurance as an affordable benefit."

Meanwhile, the Administration and the Republican majority in Congress have failed to offer a real solution for the growing number of uninsured Americans.

"During President Bush's tenure, the number of uninsured has increased by more than three million," said Rep. Rangel, Ranking Democrat on the Committee on Ways and Means. "The Republicans are so carried away with their privatization ideology that they are blind to proven policies that help the uninsured. Instead of taking steps to improve coverage, President Bush and his allies in Congress are pushing schemes that would lead to higher costs and even more uninsured families."

The Administration's proposals for helping the uninsured center on tax policies and tax shelters that would primarily help people who already have coverage and those with higher incomes, while doing very little to reduce the number of Americans with no health insurance coverage. According to Professor Kenneth Thorpe of Emory University, the President's proposals -- the Association Health Plan (AHP), the refundable health tax credit, and the tax deduction for policies sold with Health Savings Accounts (HSAs) -- are estimated to reduce the ranks of the uninsured by at most 2.1 million.

"The Bush Administration can't solve this problem by giving another tax break to the wealthy," said Rep. Brown, Ranking Democrat on the Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee. "Our bills would help over 21 million working Americans. If we're lucky, the President's health plan would help 2.1 million. The decimal is in the wrong place and so are the Administration's priorities."

"With the economy as it is, coupled with the escalating federal deficits, we need to focus on proposals that give us the most bang-for-the-buck while giving families the health security they need," said Rep. Waxman. "It's simple. The Family Care Act, the Medicare Early Access Act, and the Small Business Health Insurance Promotion Act target our limited resources directly on the largest number of uninsured while President Bush's proposals do not."